

CD 2009--59/60



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

CHOIRS IN CONCERT

Mass for Prisoners of Conscience

**University of Toronto MacMillan Singers and Master Chorale
Queen's University Choral Ensemble**

Saturday, March 28, 2009
7:30 pm. MacMillan Theatre



08|09 SEASON

WHERE GREAT MINDS MEET GREAT MUSIC

Program

Track 1

OPENING REMARKS

John Burge, composer
Iris Nowell, writer and volunteer with Amnesty International

JOHN BURGE

Mass for Prisoners of Conscience

Dedicated to Amnesty International

Track 3

Choir - Kyrie eleison
Baritone - "I was picked up..."
Choir - Christe eleison
Mezzo - "I cannot find my husband..."
Choir - Kyrie eleison
Baritone - "A thick wall of silence..."
Choir - Sanctus
Mezzo - "They have finally admitted..."
Choir - Agnus Dei
Baritone - "I have experienced the fate..."
Choir - Agnus Dei
Child - "Dear Mister President..."
Choir - Agnus Dei

Track 2

← disc error,
lost approx
1m 30sec

Disk
23

University of Toronto MacMillan Singers & Master Chorale

Queen's University Choral Ensemble

Andrew Love, baritone

Shannon Hill-Coates, mezzo-soprano

Josef Canefe, boy soprano

Doreen Rao, conductor

Christopher Dawes & Mark McDonald, piano/organ
Katherine Watson, flute, Adam Weinmann, oboe, Leah McGray Manning, clarinet
Devin Wesley, bassoon, Jamie Drake, percussion

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Mass for Prisoners of Conscience

Mass for Prisoners of Conscience is scored for baritone, mezzo-soprano and child soloists, choir and a small instrumental ensemble of four solo woodwind instruments, two pianos and percussion. The text material for the soloists consists entirely of settings of first-hand accounts of political prisoners and their families sung in English. Although the original accounts are unrelated and drawn from events that occurred in different countries, in the work they are presented in a narrative fashion with the soloists personifying the roles of an immediate family's father, mother and child. These accounts or testimonials are drawn from material that was provided by Amnesty International, to whom the work is dedicated. For much of this century, the letter-writing campaigns organized by Amnesty International have done much to bring the plight of political prisoners to the forefront of world attention. In many instances, the release of a political prisoner can be directly attributed to the efforts of AI. The forceful simplicity displayed in the letter that makes up the child's solo found at the end of this work—"Dear Mr. President, I want to ask you to let my daddy go free because he is good...."—strikingly captures the inherent power and directness of the written word when wielded with honesty and conviction.

Surrounding and alternating with the solo settings, the choir sings sections from the liturgical Mass in Latin. Like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, the choir in these movements can often be seen to comment on the emotions and situations that are expressed in the solo movements. For example, the tightly wound contrapuntal texture, marked rhythms and general relentlessness of the first *Kyrie*, musically foreshadows the capture and interrogation that is described in the text of the second movement's baritone solo. Similarly, by using only the women's voices of the choir in the introspective *Christe* setting, the listener is more gradually pulled into the stark despair that is conveyed in the first female solo.

The same kinds of interconnections can be made between the other solo and choral movements thereby making the entire work more continuous than the thirteen-movement structure may at first indicate. This lack of

division between movements is most apparent in the last movement where the final choral setting gradually enters underneath the ongoing child's solo. While the child's letter is full of the optimism that is youth, the situation of the father's imprisonment in actuality still remains unresolved. The final choral setting attempts to project musically this sense of ambiguity by the constant shifts of mood and references back to material heard earlier. It is almost with a sense of resignation that the music at the end returns to the dissonant sonority of the opening *Kyrie*.

Throughout the entire work, broad-scale structural links are developed and maintained through the use of only a few motivic elements. This self-imposed compositional limitation can be seen on a symbolic level to be analogous to the restricted emotional and physical confines described by the soloists. In some instances, the musical setting can be seen to be even more explicitly representative of the situation that is found in the text. For example, in the sixth movement, as the baritone describes in first-person a prisoner's confinement, the orchestra is reduced to just muted strings with slight touches of percussion and piano colouring. To further heighten this sense of abandonment the pitch material of the strings is entirely made up of the eleven possible transpositions of the baritone's melodic line. As a result, the dense texture created in the strings by following the baritone's own musical material so closely, yet without exact duplication, form a contrapuntal cage around the soloist.

Mass for Prisoners of Conscience was commissioned in 1987 by Vancouver's Christ Church Cathedral Choir, through funding provided by The Canada Council for the Arts. The work was premiered by the University of Toronto Symphony Chorus, Dr. Doreen Rao, conductor, on November 9th, 1990 in the MacMillan Theatre, University of Toronto. The soloists were, Russell Braun, baritone, Margaret Terry, mezzo-soprano, and Arlene Penaranda, treble. - John Burge

John Burge was born in Dryden, Ontario in 1961. He also holds degrees in Composition and Theory from the University of Toronto (B.Mus. and M.Mus.) and the University of British

Columbia (D.M.A.). Since 1987 he has been teaching composition and theory at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario where he currently holds the position of Full Professor and is Director of the School of Music.

John Burge has written a large body of vocal, chamber, and orchestral compositions. He is particularly well known though, for his choral music, which has been performed by such choirs as The Elmer Iseler Singers, The BBC Singers, The Amabile Youth Choir, The Toronto Children's Chorus and The St. Louis Symphony Children's Choir. Many of these choral works have been published by the American firm, Boosey and Hawkes. His composition, *Angels' Voices*, for choir and orchestra, received the 2006 Outstanding New Choral Composition Award from the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors and was been performed in New York City's Carnegie Hall in 2005.

Over the years John Burge has had a long and productive relationship with the Kingston Symphony and their Music Director, Glen Fast. Since 1991 they have commissioned and premiered many of his orchestral compositions, including a Piano Concerto, Clarinet Concerto, Trumpet Concerto and a Symphony. Since 1993, Burge has also written five chamber orchestra works for The Thirteen Strings of Ottawa. With titles like, *Snowdrift*, *Rocky Mountain Overture*, *Upper Canada Fiddle Suite*, and *The Canadian Shield*, it is obvious that a number of his works for large ensemble draw their influence from a distinctively Canadian perspective. Orchestras and audiences seem taken with these works as they have received numerous performances across Canada and even as far away as Brazil and Russia. A passionate advocate for Canadian music, he was a member of the Executive of the Canadian League of Composers from 1993-2007, serving as President from 1998-2006.

Texts

CHOIR: Kyrie eleison

Baritone: I was picked up even before I reached the meeting place and taken off in an unmarked car by four armed policemen. When the car stopped in the courtyard of the headquarters, they immediately began to punch and kick me in the presence of some people seated on benches in front of the main building. I was beaten as I went up the steps to a room on the top floor where they continued to slap me, hit me about the head and bang my ears with cupped hands. They took off the handcuffs and continued to hit me with their truncheons whilst questioning me.

They ordered me to strip completely; I obeyed. They made me sit down on the floor and tied my hands with a thick rope. One of the six or seven policemen present put his foot on the rope in order to tighten it. I lost all feeling in my hands. They put my knees up to my elbows so that my bound hands were on a level with my ankles. Placing an iron bar between my knees and elbows they suspended me about three feet from the floor.

After punching and clubbing me, they placed a wire on the little toe of my left foot and placed the other end between my legs. The wires were attached to a camp telephone so that the current

increased or decreased according to the speed at which the handle was turned. They began to give me electric shocks using this equipment and continued to beat me brutally. The shocks and beatings continued for several hours. As it was beginning to get dark I practically lost consciousness. Each time that I fainted, they threw water over me to increase my sensitivity to the electric shocks. One of the policemen remarked, "Look, he's letting off sparks. Let's put it in his ear now!"

CHOIR: Christe eleison

Mezzo: I cannot find my husband. I know that he was taken by the authorities, but they deny it. I have witnesses that saw him taken, but they deny it still. The local police will not investigate. Our lawyer says that even if we could find where they are holding him, they would probably move him farther away, if they haven't already done so.

I have no one to turn to. My friends avoid me. They do not wish to appear connected to me. It is as if I have a contagious disease and they don't want to get contaminated by me. Our neighbours fear for their families. I cannot blame them. The fear I have for my children is almost as intense as the fear that I have for their father.

CHOIR: Kyrie eleison

Baritone: A thick wall of silence, a silence of terror and of the grave surrounds this place, this prison, this hell-hole. Sometimes they blindfold you for days on end. Some people are even left blindfolded for weeks or months. They keep you like this to add to the fear—then suddenly they whip off the folds to interrogate you. You are almost blind, the light is painful and you can't concentrate on a single thought. One man has spent twenty-seven months like this. Now he sits largely in total silence wagging his head from one side to the other. Sometimes he just sits knocking his head on the wall.

This waiting is interrupted by the interrogations. With torture they can get you to say anything they want. After the last session I was seen by a doctor and given a document to sign which included statements made under duress and also stated that I had been well treated. When I refused to sign they threatened to start torturing my family. Under such circumstances one has to sign.

CHOIR: Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, dominus Deus Sabaoth! Pleni sunt coeli et terra Gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis. Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis.

Mezzo: They have finally admitted they are holding him. For weeks the authorities had assured the judge that "...the person in question was not in their custody." The liars! Of course they still have yet to charge him, but at least they are letting him write letters home. He says he is fine, but I know that this is not the truth. There is no truth. Can there ever be any truth?

Soon we will run out of money. I cannot obtain a 'Declaration of Non-involvement' from the government. It is impossible to get a job without one. Soon I will not be able to feed and clothe our children. Right now I can barely afford to send them to school. Perhaps the only thing I know for certain, is that as miserable as my life is, my husband's can only be worse.

CHOIR: Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Baritone: I have experienced the fate of a victim. I have seen the torturer's face at close quarters. It was in a worse condition than my own bleeding, livid face. The torturer's face was distorted by a kind of twitching that had nothing human about it. He was in such a state of tension that he had an expression very similar to those we see on Chinese masks; I am not exaggerating. It is not an easy thing to torture people. For torturing requires inner participation. In this situation, I turned out to be the lucky one. For although I was humiliated, at least I did not humiliate others. I was simply bearing a profoundly unhappy humanity on my aching back. Whereas the men who humiliate you must first humiliate the notion of humanity within themselves.

Never mind if they strut around in their uniforms, swollen with the knowledge that they can control the suffering, the sleeplessness, the hunger and the despair of their fellow human beings, intoxicated with the power in their hands. Their intoxication is nothing other than the degradation of humanity—the ultimate degradation. They have had to pay dearly for my torments. I was not the one in the worse position. I was just a man who moaned because he was in great pain. I prefer that. At this moment I am deprived of the joy of seeing my children going to school or playing in the park. Whereas the men who are holding me here, every morning they must first look their own children in the face.

CHOIR: Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Child: Dear Mister President,

I want to ask you to let my daddy go free because he is good. I haven't seen him in such a long, long time! He always sends me little drawings and stories. I was always going to 'La Plata' before with my granma, but I can't go there now because it is very far and I would have to take a plane. My mother also wants him to be free so we could all live together and he can buy me candy and toys. My friends are always asking me for my daddy. I tell them that when you, Mr. President, let my daddy go free he will take all of us to the park to play ball.

CHOIR: Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, Dona nobis pacem.

Biographies

Dr. Doreen Rao is a distinguished musician and scholar whose work as a conductor and teacher links the standards of professional performance with the goals of music education. Celebrated for her spirited and moving concerts, Dr. Rao's commitment to choral music is recognized in her worldwide appearances as conductor, master class teacher and speaker and in her award-winning Choral Music Experience publications with Boosey & Hawkes. Appointed to the University of Toronto Faculty of Music as the *Elmer Iseler Chair in Conducting*, Doreen Rao has founded the Centre for Advanced Studies in Choral Music, an innovative university enrichment program which connects emerging young singers, conductors, and composers with prominent artists and educators. As Director of Choral Programs, Dr. Rao conducts the MacMillan Singers and the Bach Festival Singers in concerts and collaborations with Helmuth Rilling, Peter Oundjian and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Nexus, the Elmer Iseler Singers and the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra. The **University of Toronto MacMillan Singers** was founded in 1994 by Doreen Rao to celebrate the legacy of Sir Ernest MacMillan, an inspired performer and devoted teacher who influenced every aspect of Canada's musical life. This award-winning ensemble conducted by Doreen Rao regularly performs with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Peter Oundjian. The MacMillan Singers enjoy numerous collaborations with Helmuth Rilling, Nexus, the Elmer Iseler Singers and the Gryphon Trio. Recent seasons have included Festival performances of Bach *Cantatas*, Mozart *C Minor Mass*, Stravinsky *Les Noces*, and the Mozart *Requiem*. In October 2007, the MacMillan Singers performed the *St. John Passion BWV 245* in the Toronto Bach Festival.

Brad Ratzlaff is Director of the University of Toronto **Master Chorale**. He is also the Music Director and Organist at Trinity-St. Paul's United Church, and is on the teaching faculty of the University of Toronto, and is the Artistic Director of the Hart House Chorus. Brad has twice been the recipient of the Elmer Iseler Fellowship in choral conducting, and holds a M.Mus in Performance (Conducting) at the University of Toronto. He holds Associate degrees from the Royal Conservatory of Music and the Royal Canadian College of Organists.

Dr. Karen Frederickson is Associate Professor of Music, cross-appointed to the Faculty of Education, at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, specializing in music education and choral music. She is currently Director of Queen's University Choral Ensemble, a large mixed-voice choir and the Coordinator of Music Education. The **Queen's University Choral Ensemble** serves both music majors and non-majors and celebrates a wide range of choral music. For over a decade, QCE joins the Kingston Choral Society and the Kingston Symphony Orchestra to present a major choral work during the fall semester, and regularly contributes to campus events. Some of the notable conductors of QCE are Denise Narcisse-Mair, Dr. Rudolf Schnitzler, Margaret McLellan, Dr. Clifford Crawley, Dr. Peter Allen, Dr. Andree Dagenais, Dr. Mark Sirett, Ian Juby, Michael Tansley, and Brainerd Blyden-Taylor.

Baritone **Andrew Love**, a native of Calgary, is currently enrolled in the Opera Diploma program at the University of Toronto, studying in the studio of J. Patrick Raftery.

Mezzo soprano **Shannon Coates** Shannon holds a Bachelor of Music, Vocal Performance from the University of Toronto and, in September, 2008 was offered a Fellowship to complete her Masters in Performance, specializing in Vocal Pedagogy, also at the University of Toronto, studying with Lorna MacDonald.

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Rainbow Chan
Viola Chehlarova
Yan Ning Chou
Katya Dernovagimian
Huixin Feng
Jaeyon Kang
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Sara Wright

Soprano II

Rosalind Ballanger
Shannon Blakely
Amanda Caruk

Karen Chan
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Laura Guillan
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Claire Guindon
Madeline Harris
Mandy Inglis
Elissa Kent
Cathy Nielson
Meghan Pepper
Claire Renouf
Katie Sebestyen
Vanessa Spratt
Grace Waschuk

Alto

Meryem BenKirane
Bethany Biggs
Sara Briginshaw
Sarah Dall
Nastasha Dillabough
Amy Dryden

Freyah Durand
Jillian Fulton
Erin Halinaty
Stephenie McNeil
Luise McTaggart
Cassandra Miller
Tamera Newberry
Kati Pearson
Stephanie Prince
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Stephanie Roman
Rosalind Sham
Eva To
Erica Zimmerman

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